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LAURA FARNHAM AND SCHOOLS FOR ARMENIAN GIRLS IN BARDIZAG AND ADABAZAR

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In 1871, Laura Farnham journeyed from her home in New Castle, Maine, to Nicomedia (Izmid/Ismid), Turkey in order to establish a boarding high school for Armenian girls under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), then the largest and most successful organization of its kind in the United States. She was part of a post-Civil War movement by American women to become more actively involved in foreign missionary endeavors. Women had been strong advocates of missions from the beginning, but now they moved from passive support to active participation. The newly formed women's boards proved adept not only in raising money but also in enlisting female recruits to volunteer for service abroad. In the face of such support, the earlier reluctance of the governing boards to engage single women for overseas assignments gave way to enthusiastic acceptance of the assistance women could provide in missionary programs. Women were especially valued as educators, and nowhere were they more successful than in the Ottoman Empire. There the Armenians, much more so than the other nationalities, gradually but steadily recognized the advantages of educating their females and enrolled their daughters in the missionary schools.[1]

[1] Works about women in the American missionary movement include R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdman's, 1980); Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985); and Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener, eds., *Women and Missions, Past and Present: Anthropological*

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After spending her first months learning the Armenian language and opening a small school in Nicomedia, Farnham was transferred to the nearby town of Bardizag, where for the next twelve years she successfully ran a girls' high school that quickly earned a favorable reputation despite considerable initial skepticism locally regarding the value of educating women. She then, in 1885, accepted an invitation to move her school to nearby Adabazar, where she continued to educate Armenian girls until her return home to the United States in 1910. In all, she had spent thirty-eight years of service in Turkey.

Farnham's school in Adabazar became part of a network of higher educational institutions for girls in the Ottoman Empire headed by American missionary women and serving largely Armenians. The other schools were in Marsovan, Aintab, Bitlis, Kharpert, Mardin, Sivas, and Talas, and the so-called "Home" in Constantinople, which became the Constantinople College for Women. Farnham began her high school with day pupils as well as boarders, and later added a preparatory department and still later, a kindergarten. The fundamental purpose of all of these schools was to provide a Christian education for future teachers, mothers, and community leaders. Boarding schools were especially favored, as in this way the missionaries could influence every aspect of a student's life.[2] A study of Farnham's work in Turkey provides insight into the impact of American missionaries on Armenian communities as well as information about the local Armenian communities.

The area to which Laura Farnham was assigned, the triangle of Nicomedia/Bardizag/Adabazar, had been the site of early preaching by the Americans. The Reverend William Goodell, founder of the American mission to the Armenians, had passed through Nicomedia/Izmid in 1832 and distributed tracts, some of which fell into the hands of the local Armenian Apostolic priests Der Vertanes (Ter Vrtanes) and Der Haratiun (Ter Harutiun), who figured among the earliest converts to Protestant views. The warm welcome initially extended by the Armenian Church hierarchy to fellow Christians from America quickly changed to hostility as

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and Historical Perceptions (Providence/Oxford: Berg, 1993).

[2] Many of these higher educational institutions are described in Frank Andrews Stone, *Academies for Anatolia: A Study of the Rationale, Program and Impact of the Educational Institutions Sponsored by the American Board in Turkey, 1830-1980* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

the reforms advocated by the Americans were seen as a threat to the traditional Armenian faith, and Armenian converts to Protestant views were often excommunicated. With the official establishment of the Armenian Protestant Church in 1846, tense relations between Protestant and Apostolic communities intensified, as Protestant Armenians were denied the protection of the Armenian *millet* or collective community. This not only prevented converts from burying their dead in Armenian cemeteries, but it deprived them of many civil rights, such as belonging to the guilds necessary to carry on various trades. Soon after the establishment of the first Armenian Protestant church in Constantinople in 1846, Der Haratiun, who by then had completed a course of study at Cyrus Hamlin's Bebek Seminary in Constantinople, was ordained pastor of newly formed Protestant churches in Nicomedia and Adabazar.[3]

Farnham's arrival in Turkey came at a critical time in the American mission to the Armenians. The Armenians had retained their identity in a Muslim society for centuries largely through loyalty to their ancient Christian religion, and they did not welcome strangers from the West telling them how to educate their children, let alone insisting on the need for reform in the beliefs and traditions of their national church. However, mainly by providing low-cost education to a largely illiterate population, the American missionaries attracted a following, which led to the establishment of the Protestant Church. Just as this Protestant community was struggling to get on its feet, however, the American mission undermined its own effort by embarking in the 1860s on a new policy that sharply curtailed educational programs except for the elementary teaching of literacy. Popular higher educational institutions that had been established in the capital, such as Cyrus Hamlin's Bebek Seminary for Boys and its sister establishment, the Seminary for Girls, were closed accordingly. Over the vigorous objections from missionaries in the field, the American Board headquarters in Boston ruled that these institutions provided a higher level of education than that needed for religious work; it also demanded that the seminaries be moved from the capital, which in its

[3] William E. Strong, *Story of the American Board* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1910), p. 222.

opinion offered too many distractions to students and graduates, in order to be reestablished in the provinces.[4]

At the same time, efforts of the Armenian Protestant Church leaders to assert some independence and direction over their institutions met with strong resistance from the American missionaries, who controlled the purse strings. By the time of Farnham's arrival, Armenian Protestant churches in western Turkey had formed an association called the Bithynia Union, and the three Protestant churches in the triangle area had formed a closer association, called a "presbytery" or "synod," whose relations with the Americans were uneasy and sometimes even hostile. Armenians argued, to no avail, that they knew their own needs better than did the foreigners and should have a voice in determining the allocation of resources.[5] Some of these tensions between the Armenians and the Americans in the region have been described by one of the early American woman educators, Maria A. West, a teacher at the first Protestant higher education establishment for girls in Constantinople in the 1850s. West devoted the first three chapters of her widely read book, *Romance of Missions,* to her visits to Bardizag, Adabazar, and Nicomedia. She provides a revealing account of a conversation with Brother Kevork, her host at Adabazar. "Of one thing I am certain," the young convert told her, "the missionaries should have done *less* for us, or *more.*" He explained that the early missionaries showered the Armenians with attention and encouraged them to leave their native church, but once the Armenians had done so and

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[4] For a brief discussion of this controversy, see Barbara Merguerian, "Cyrus Hamlin and American Education for Armenians in Constantinople," in *Armenian Constantinople*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2010), pp. 210-12.

[5] A major complaint was that the evangelical churches were not invited and were not consulted in mission meetings. An 1874 editorial in the Armenian paper *Tidag (Ditak*; Observer) regarding the mission's Annual Meeting in Constantinople stated: "It is understood that the native churches and pastors are entirely ignorant of what has been done. They have had no part in its meetings and whatever they know of them has come from afar and by report. A native pastor, however good, however experienced, however faithful he may have been, has never been invited to have a part in this. . . We heartily wish a remedy could be found." Translation by Justin W. Parsons. Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), Houghton Library, Harvard University (also available on microfilm). ABC 16.9.3, The Near East, 1817-1919, Western Turkey Mission, 1871-1880, vol. 7, Letters, № 339, Aug. 6, 1874 (Microfim № 593).

suffered much persecution for their efforts, they were left to fend for themselves, with little financial assistance from the Americans. Brushing aside West's assertions that Americans were facing financial difficulties at home that had reduced available funds, the Armenian argued that the Americans had not kept their early promises of support and pointed out that American missionaries were supported in ways Armenian Protestants were not. West responded by praising the virtues of independence and self-help of the Armenians and called for love and understanding on both sides. Later, Maria West wrote, she "was left to query whether, indeed, there had been a radical evil from the first, in the distance between the missionaries and the people whom they were seeking to evangelize" and concluded that, if the missionaries had possessed an intimate knowledge of the people from the beginning, "how many mistakes might be avoided in laying foundations."[6]

It was into this atmosphere that Laura Farnham arrived in Turkey. She must have had a strong personality to run her own school successfully for so many years. Her school was popular from the beginning and always had more applicants than could be admitted. According to her associates, she had high academic standards and always looked for ways to improve instruction. Yet, she never showed an interest in developing the school into a higher institution, or college, as did many of her associates during this period. From her correspondence, she emerges as hard-working, modest, and retiring; she was not prone to write articles in missionary publications as did many others. One of her close co-workers confessed to some hesitation in describing her because "Miss Farnham herself is so opposed to publicity of any kind that it seems somewhat like a betrayal of friendship to write about her."[7]

Farnham stands out in two respects. First, after her move to Adabazar in 1885, she was the only missionary in the community—indeed she claimed to be the only foreigner (that is, non-Ottoman subject) living in Adabazar at the time. The touring

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[6] Maria A. West, *The Romance of Missions: Or Inside Views of Life and Labor, in the Land of Ararat* (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1875), chapters 1-3, esp. pp. 56-71.

[7] ABCFM, Series ABC 77.1, Collective and Individual Biography, Box 24, Laura Farnham, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

of Maria West in the region indicates that the sight of a single American woman missionary was not a novelty. But it was unusual, if not unique, for a single missionary woman to live alone in a community where there were no other Americans. The American Board was reluctant for many years to send unmarried women out to the mission stations; and later, when unmarried women became more prominent in the field, they were always assigned to live with, or near, a missionary family. All of the negotiations with the local communities over the running of the schools were typically carried out by the male missionaries. It is true that Farnham was living fairly close to the missionary station in Bardizag, and not too far from Constantinople, though in her early days it required a long and arduous trip to reach either destination.

The second unique feature of Farnham's work was that her school in Adabazar was supported entirely by the local Armenian community. She herself, and her missionary associate teachers, were assigned by the American Board, and their salaries (as well as some limited scholarships) were paid by the Women's Board, but the school itself was run and supported by a local Board of Trustees, the Armenian teachers were paid by the local community, and the school was financially independent of the American Board.

Farnham's ability to get along with the Armenian Board of Trustees is all the more remarkable when one considers her early difficulties with local leaders, who tended to be conservative in those days. She began her career in Bardizag with what appears to have been a minor issue that grew into a serious dispute. When her school opened in Bardizag, she took her boarding students to the Protestant church for Sunday services only to find that women were not allowed in the chapel but were instead herded onto a tiny balcony which was hot, stifling, and almost entirely cut off from the church. She refused to attend services or to allow her students to do so under these circumstances, and the church trustees refused to allow her students to sit in the chapel. What was to be done? The Reverend Justin S. Parsons or another American from Constantinople might occasionally conduct a special service for the students, but this could be arranged only irregularly. For several months, Farnham and her pupils were absent from church, a situation that could not be allowed to continue for long. Finally, a compromise was reached whereby

the balcony was enlarged and extended, providing a comfortable space for the girls and women while keeping them from sitting in the chapel itself. Perhaps this was a useful lesson for Farnham in learning the value of compromise in dealing with local trustees.[8] From this inauspicious beginning, she ultimately became recognized for her unmatched ability to get along with native trustees, particularly after her move from Bardizag to Adabazar.

Biography

Laura Farnham was born in 1844 in New Castle, Maine, and educated in local schools and then the Lincoln Academy. She taught grammar school in Damascotta, Maine, for several years before volunteering and being accepted for missionary service. She sailed from Boston in November 1871 along with a missionary couple assigned to the same area, Mr. and Mrs. William Spaulding, and in January 1872 arrived in Nicomedia, where she spent her first months. She immediately took to missionary work; after three months she had made enough progress in the language that it was deemed possible to open a small school.

If Farnham was mentally and emotionally up to the work, she encountered serious physical obstacles, as did many of the missionaries. After five or six months she came down with a severe respiratory condition that obliged her to go to Constantinople for medical attention and to leave the school in the hands of a native Armenian associate. The doctor strongly urged her to go to Europe or back home to recover, but she stubbornly refused. Returning to Nicomedia in the fall, she resumed school with five pupils, who rapidly increased in number to twenty-four, eight of them from "old Armenian families" (meaning Apostolic, not Protestant), all bright and smart. "If they make as much progress in the future as they have in the past, I shall be perfectly satisfied," she wrote home in November 1872. During this period, her associates, the Spauldings, had to go to Constantinople for health reasons, leaving her entirely alone in

[8] ABCFM Papers, ABC 16.9.3, Western Turkey Mission, vol. 5, Documents, Reports, Minutes, 1871-1880, № 116, Constantinople Station Report, 1875; vol. 6, Letters, № 701, Bardizag, Oct. 14, 1874, Laura Farnham to Rev. Clark, Boston (M589, 591).

Nicomedia for three months, living with a native Armenian woman who knew no English. "I did feel very lonely," she later confessed, "as there were days and even weeks when I did not hear or speak a word of English." [9] Although she lamented the absence of an English-speaking Armenian teacher, this emersion method seems to have helped her to acquire a fluency in the language quickly. It was later said that "her use of the Armenian language was peculiar, but she made herself perfectly well understood."[10]

Farnham arrived in Turkey at a time when the American mission was taking steps to standardize its school system, with special recognition of the important role that could be played by women. The 1872 Annual Meeting of the Western Turkey mission, recognizing the Boston Prudential Committee's call for enlargement of woman's work and the necessity for higher schools for girls at the interior stations, appointed a committee to study the issue. Accordingly, a plan was presented at the 1873 Annual Meeting supporting the long-term goal of encouraging local communities to establish schools for girls. But "inasmuch as in most of our station fields the people are still backward in the matter of the education of girls," the report called upon the mission to support fully or partially pupils in community schools or, where no schools existed, to establish their own schools. The schools should be modest, with no large outlay of funds for accommodations. For those pupils supported wholly or partially by the mission, the policy called for training in domestic labor and requiring from such pupils a certain amount of domestic labor, a rule that "must be rigidly adhered to." The primary goals of the elementary schools were to prepare pupils for the mission higher schools or boarding schools for women, which in turn were to educate girls from rural stations to be teachers in their villages, and to be a nucleus and a stimulant to the people in the better education of their daughters.[11]

For high schools supported in any way by the missions, candidates were to be at least twelve years of age and were to

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[9] Ibid., ABC 16.9.4, Western Turkey Mission, Women's Board 1870-1892, vol. 8, Western Turkey Mission, 1870-1882, Letters from Missionaries, № 96, Farnham, Nicomedia, Nov. 13, 1872, and № 94, Jan. 18, 1872.

[10] ABC 77.1, Box 24, Laura Farnham.

[11] ABC 16.9.3, Western Turkey Mission, vol. 5, Documents, Annual Meetings, № 1, Constantinople, May 31, 1872, and № 2, May 1873 (M588).

have a testimonial as to character and intellectual promise from some responsible person. Unless she came from an area with no schools, she also had to be able to read, write, and spell in Armenian or Armeno-Turkish (Turkish language written in the Armenian alphabet), must have completed Jones Catechism and committed to memory the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments, and must have a satisfactory examination in arithmetic as far as fractions. The course of study was to be two years and include Bible lessons, arithmetic, geography, Armenian grammar, reading and spelling in Armenian or Armeno-Turkish, needlework, and singing. Optional subjects were Turkish grammar, astronomy, physiology, and English. Those entering the boarding schools required additional preparation. Five years later, reflecting the success of Laura Farnham's school, the 1878 Annual Meeting approved a proposal to enlarge the course of study at her Bardizag school and to give it the primary responsibility to supply female teachers for the Armenian-speaking communities in the region of Nicomedia, Constantinople, and Brusa (Bursa).[12]

Bardizag

By June 1873, Farnham considered herself settled in Nicomedia. "If home is where the heart is, then my home is here," she wrote in a letter. However the decision had been made at the annual missionary meeting in Constantinople that the Spauldings should be stationed in Bardizag, leaving Farnham alone in Nicomedia, "something not approved of, so I had to yield," she explained. "I feel very sad to leave my work here," she continued.[13]

The resident missionary in Bardizag, who with his wife and daughter was to have a long and close association with Laura Farnham, was the Reverend Justin Parsons. In the fall of 1872, Parsons had purchased for the mission a piece of land with several buildings, including a "cocoonery" that was to be remodeled into a girls' school. As Reverend Parsons described the site, the ground sloped to the north, and nothing obstructed the

[12] Ibid., № 6, Constantinople, Annual Meeting, May 1878.

[13] ABC 16.9.4, Women's Board, Letters, vol. 8, № 97, Nicomedia, June 10, 1873 (Houghton); ABC 16.9.3, Western Turkey Mission, vol. 6, № 697, 1873 [no month and day] (M 591).

view of the gulf, Nicomedia, and beyond. The grounds of the school went from street to street and the school was surrounded by mulberry trees. The town was principally to the west and southwest of the site. On the ground floor were dormitories for the girls as well as space for a future primary department. The school flourished from the beginning, and Parsons was authorized three years later, in 1875, to purchase a mulberry orchard adjoining the school premises, to be used as playground, woodshed, oven, and also to preserve the land from being built upon, as the city was expanding rapidly during this time.[14] The building, which at first was both a missionary dwelling and a school, was about 76 feet in length and 33 feet in breadth, with four rooms on the first floor and five on the second. The room in which the girls were to study during the day was described as quite large, 33 feet in length by 29 feet in width, well lighted and ventilated. There was also a recitation room, and four large rooms intended for the use of boarding scholars. An organ, as well as a bell, both of them donated from friends in the United States, gave a special aspect to the school.[15] The bell in particular was considered a "great blessing to a community where there is hardly one timekeeper to a thousand people."[16]

The dedication service attracted a large crowd. The attendees were packed in platoons about fifty deep on the floor. Ceremonies of this kind (especially graduation exercises) were carefully planned by the Americans and they attracted large audiences of Armenians, most of them not Protestants, throughout Turkey. One can speculate that they offered entertainment of a sort generally lacking in the villages in those days; for the Americans they provided a welcome opportunity to spread information about their work. At the Bardizag dedication service, one American observer noted: "Considering the multitude gathered, the length of the service, and the fact that besides the seven hundred adults and children, there were at least a hundred babies to enliven the scene, the attention to the speakers was very good." American missionaries from Constantinople were present, as well as pastors from neighboring Protestant churches.[17]

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[14]ABC 16.9.3, Western Turkey Mission, vol. 7, Letters, № 357, Parsons, Bardizag, Dec. 25, 1875 (M593).

[15] Ibid., vol. 8, № 90, William A. Spaulding, Bardizag, July 29, 1873 (M594).

[16] Ibid., vol. 7, № 332, Parsons, Bardizag, Oct. 25, 1873 (M593).

[17] Ibid., vol. 8, № 90, Spaulding, July 29, 1873 (M594).

The school opened the first of September 1873 with twenty-seven students, three of them boarding pupils from neighboring villages. About one-third of the day pupils were from Armenian Apostolic households, and throughout the decades Farnham's school attracted large numbers of Apostolic students. The tuition of one piaster a week was collected on Mondays. In common with the other American schools in Turkey, most of the students came from middle or lower middle class families who had difficulty in paying even a modest tuition. Yet it was missionary policy that parents generally should pay at least part of the tuition cost. Many families could not afford to make these payments, and Farnham's letters are full of descriptions of her difficulties in collecting the sums. But she was persistent and unwavering. The school rooms from the beginning were open on Sundays for public worship and Bible instruction and "filled with females of every age," most of them from the Apostolic Church.[18]

In preparation for the school in Bardizag, Farnham touched upon a controversial issue when she wrote to her mission superiors in Boston with a request for desks for her students. Again, this was a minor issue, but an indication of the kinds of dilemmas faced by the missionaries. With the praiseworthy purpose of retaining native customs, missionary policy at the time did not encourage desks in their schoolrooms, insisting instead that pupils sit on the floor, as had been the tradition in Armenian schools. Farnham was told that providing desks would establish an undesirable precedent. Though not a demanding person, Farnham had a practical bent of mind and could not see the wisdom in a policy that required her to bend over constantly to work with her pupils. She wrote in the fall of 1873 that the lack of desks was a problem:

> It has been stressed that we should not ask for anything that is not absolutely necessary. But I do think that the mission makes a mistake when they refuse us things that the want of makes us sick. I think if they would get down on the floor as many times as I have for the past two weeks they would say no more about "establishing a precedent."[19]

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[18] Ibid., vol. 6, Letters, № 699, Farnham, Bardizag, Jan. 29, 1874; Documents, vol. 5, № 155, Nicomedia Station Report for 1873 (M591, 589).

[19] ABC 16.9.4, Western Turkey Mission, Women's Board, Letters, vol.8, №

Her persistence was rewarded, as the Boston office supplied her with the desks.

The following twelve years were spent in developing the Bardizag school, which always had a larger number of applicants than could be accommodated. In early 1876, Parsons reported that almost eighty pupils were packed into the sixty desks available at the school and that "the number of very promising applications turned away would go far toward stocking another institution of the same kind."[20] The missionary girls' schools were based on the model established by Mary Lyon at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts as simple establishments providing a basic education. Housekeeping was organized so that the boarding students themselves did all of the cooking, cleaning, ironing, and other chores on a rotating basis. There were no servants. Dress was to be simple and neat, but not elaborate.[21] Clothes had been a problem at first. The students' wardrobes did not meet missionary standards, and parents were too poor to supply proper dress. There was no alternative but to teach sewing. At first, squares of material were acquired from Constantinople or the United States, and students made a quilt that was presented to a poor woman for Christmas. Then a sewing circle was formed to teach the making of clothes from purchased patterns and material. To cover the cost of patterns and cloth, extra garments were made and sold. Thus, a new skill was acquired by the girls at the same time as they were able to meet their wardrobe needs: "I wish you could see some of the articles made by the girls," Farnham wrote home in 1876. "They would be a credit to anyone." By the time the first sewing machine arrived in 1883, the students were expert in sewing.[22]

Farnham had high educational standards, too much so according to Reverend Parsons: "I fear sometimes that the standard and aims of Miss Farnham's school are too high," he wrote. "She does not appear to realize the difference, as it regards the demands of the public, between Newcastle in New England and

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97, Farnham, Nicomedia, June 10, 1873.

[20] ABC 16.93, Letters, vol. 7, № 359, Parsons, Bardizag, March 22, 1876 (M593).

[21] On the influence in Turkey of the Mt. Holyoke model, see Stone, *Academies,* pp. 18-20,

[22] Women's Board, Letters, vol. 8, № 99, Farnham, Bardizag, Dec. 18, 1873, and № 104, Jan. 19, 1876; vol. 10, № 193, 1883.

Bardizag in Turkey."[23] This touches upon a serious difference of opinion regarding policy among the Americans between those (mostly missionaries in the field) who found it natural that, as the students were becoming educated, they would be ready for an increasing level of instruction, and others (administrators in Boston) who argued that a minimal level of literacy and a sprinkling of math and science were sufficient education for the new converts. It was an argument won by the conservative administrators in Boston in the mid-century, and it led to the resignation of talented educators such as Cyrus Hamlin, who went on to establish the independent Robert College in Constantinople. The policy was reversed in the last two decades of the century but not before serious damage had been done to relations with the Armenians, who felt that earlier promises made to them by the missionaries had been broken.

Parsons also asserted that Farnham worked too hard, citing the schedule in 1879 as evidence: the morning rising bell is at 5 a.m.; the girls prepare their breakfast; morning devotions follow at 6 a.m., then breakfast at 6:30. The study hall bell rings at 8 a.m. and the day pupils are promptly in their places at 9 a.m. (if they are late they are not allowed in). Four days (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday) are devoted to academic work. Wednesday is given to music, Turkish compositions, and domestic sewing. Baking, housecleaning, and other domestic duties are attended to on Saturdays. Religious devotions take place every evening. By this time, Parsons reported, the experiment of girls teaching in the villages is no longer a doubtful one. The demand for teachers, even for those who have not yet finished the school, is greater than the supply. Several of the students who are married are helping in their villages. "The influence of the school in various ways is permeating every community within the bounds of the station and even beyond," Parsons added.[24]

Sunday was devoted to church services, Sunday School, and women's meetings. In addition to her school work, Farnham was responsible for the Sunday School of 100 to 200 children, and she also played an important role in the women's meetings, which attracted large numbers of Apostolic women as well as

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[23] ABC 16.9.3, Letters, vol. 7, № 361, Parsons, Bardizag, May 22, 1876 (M593).

[24] Ibid., № 384, Feb. 18, 1879.

Protestants. According to Farnham's description, Bardizag at that time had a population of 8,000, all Armenian. The Protestant Church had about 100 members, with Sunday congregations numbering about 300 persons.[25] Farnham continued to suffer from ill health during this period, as she did throughout her service in Turkey, but she insisted on keeping up her rigorous schedule.

Assisting Laura Farnham in the teaching were Mrs. Parsons and the Parsons' daughter, Lella (Electa). Additional assistance was provided by an Armenian male student who taught Armenian. A native teacher, a graduate of the Seminary for Girls in Marsovan, was employed, the first of a number who were to follow. By February 1874, Farnham wrote of her fifty pupils that, though they were "very imperfect," yet their improvement over the past four months "encourages us to hope that much will be done for the elevation of women here by establishing schools." In April 1877, she wrote of her students: "They are much like pupils at home—some are quick and bright, others are dull and require a great deal of patience." The graduation exercises continued to attract large audiences, with some attendees who were seriously interested in education and others who "only came to see or hear some new thing." Farnham took great pride in her students; in 1873, she noted that (thanks to the Armenian-language teacher, Baron/Mister Nishan, a young man from Constantinople) the students' compositions were excellent: "The tendency among Armenians is to have so much ancient Armenian that no one can understand," she reported to the Board. "The girls' compositions were just the best Armenian and yet so simple that everyone could understand."[26]

From the beginning, a great demand was felt for graduates of the school to teach in the villages. Of the first senior class, four members were graduated early, in January 1877, after three and a half years, because of the "urgent need of their labors in the villages." They were assigned one each in Armash, Ortakoy, Chinguler (Chengilar), and Shakshik. In the spring term of 1877, there were sixty school students, including twenty who were boarders and only half of whom were Protestants.[27] There was

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[25] ABC 16.9.4, Women's Board, Letters, vol. 8, № 123, June 18, 1882.

[26] ABC 16.9.3, vol. 6, Letters, № 709, Bardizag, July 30, 1880 (M591).

[27] Ibid., vol. 5, Documents, № 119, Report of the Constantinople Station, April

another competing demand for the students. As described by Reverend Parsons:

> Miss Farnham has been greatly tried by applications for brides; one has come to look for a bride for her brother, another is looking for a wife for her son, another asks for a companion for his friend in Armash. The *chorbaji* of Ovajuk wants an educated girl for his heir apparent. The preacher in Bilijik sent for a young girl to be his wife and as his application was approved by the parents and Mr. Richardson [the local missionary] it was successful, though right in the middle of the term. Then came a young man from Keremet and claimed his betrothed and when refused appealed to the local authorities by whom his claim was supported. This case was settled by my taking the girl to her native village and marrying them there—*to be married* being the chief need of life. The ordinary and subordinate affairs of the school have been greatly disturbed by these occurrences.[28]

Distressed by criticism that some of her graduates teaching in the villages were lacking in experience, Farnham immediately instituted a training class. A small group of young children was taken in to be instructed by the girls, and after five months of schooling, the youngsters recited proficiently in geography, arithmetic, writing, and spelling. The parents were delighted and so were the girls. Farnham wrote that children in the village did not know their letters at age six or seven, "so that our babies seemed to be prodigies of learning." Her purpose at the time, however, was not to educate the children but rather to instruct their teachers in effective methods: "I wanted to show the people that these girls can teach."[29] The success of this effort no doubt encouraged the subsequent establishment of a kindergarten, and later a teacher training course.

Over the years, the numbers of boarders increased, despite the difficult local conditions before and during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. In 1878, the school enrolled about seventy-five girls, half of whom were boarders, and twenty-two had graduated, most of whom had become teachers. There was a

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1877 (M589).

[28] Ibid., vol. 7, Letters, № 360, Parsons, Bardizag, May 9, 1876 (M593).

[29] ABC 16.9.4, Women's Board, Letters, vol. 8, № 111, Farnham, Bardizag, Jan. 23, 1878.

rule that all scholarship students should teach for a minimum of two years. By this time, Lella Parsons had officially become Farnham's first American assistant.

During the years in Bardizag, Farnham was closely associated with the Reverend Justin Parsons and his family. Though stationed in Bardizag, Parsons spent much of his time traveling throughout the small Greek and Armenian towns and villages in the region. In general, he shared the prevailing missionary attitude that the local churches should remain modest in scope and that the pastor's salaries should be accordingly moderate. When the pastor of the Adabazar church, the Reverend Alexander Djidjizian, went to Scotland to raise funds for a new church edifice and was promised the donation of a structure made of iron, Parsons was critical of what he considered an extravagance.[30] He and his wife provided strong support for Farnham and her school, and Farnham was devastated when Parsons and his Armenian companion were robbed and murdered while returning home from a missionary tour in 1880.[31]

The American missionary women are often described as the first feminists. This is a matter of definition. But there is no doubt that the "elevation of women" in foreign lands was often cited as a major benefit of missionary activity and that the Woman's Boards made every effort to make certain that women's programs received a fair share of attention and resources. In the Ottoman Empire, where access to women was not always easy or possible for males, it was mainly the women—the missionary wives and single women—who worked with the women. With her dedication to women's education, Laura Farnham could not help but become concerned with many aspects of the women's lives. Particularly in the early years, she had been appalled at the emphasis on arranging marriage for girls, and at such a young

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[30]ABC 16.9.3, Letters, vol. 7, № 352, July 12, 1875. Maria West thought that Parsons should spend more time building up the Protestant community in Bardizag rather than touring so extensively. "We believed that, in the end, it would prove infinitely better to cultivate thoroughly one portion [of the field]," she wrote, "than to merely scratch the surface of half-a-dozen." *Romance,* p.116.

[31] Parsons and his companion were apparently robbed and murdered by two young men belonging to a nomadic tribe called "Yourooks," who were quickly apprehended. They claimed to know nothing about the identity of their victims but were motivated by robbery, from which they gained less than $5 and Parsons' wristwatch. The incident is described by fellow missionary J.E. Pierce, ABC 16.9.3, vol. 7, Letters, № 543, Izmid, Aug. 13, 1880 (M593).

age. And if the right husband could not be immediately found, the young girls were married to whoever was available and then destined to come under the influence of their mothers-in-law, described by Farnham as "tyrants in this land."[32] In a case particularly disturbing, a Protestant graduate who had been a good student and a successful teacher was married to a man sympathetic to her religious beliefs, but when she had a baby, her mother-in-law insisted that the child be baptized in the Armenian Church. Although upset by this circumstance, the bride did not wish to create a constant source of disunity in the family and therefore went along with her mother-in-law's wishes. In another case, a graduate had been engaged by her parents to a man she could hardly be expected to speak to, let alone marry. Yet, since her father paid for all of her education, Farnham reluctantly concluded that there was nothing to be done about the situation.[33]

The cultivation of silkworms was the overriding occupation in Bardizag, and Farnham could not help but note that the women performed almost all of the physical work in this labor-intensive endeavor. During the season of the silkworms, she saw the women walking down the streets bending under their heavy loads, for the leaves were brought from gardens two and three miles away on the backs of the women: "If you knew about the culture of the silkworm you know the amount of labor required. And yet our sisters come every Thursday afternoon for a season of prayer. They go from the prayer meeting to the gardens to bring the leaves home." Women also played a key role in the "factories" where the cocoons were spun into yarn, often working twelve to fifteen hours a day. The weaving of fabric was done in the homes, again by the women.[34]

Adabazar

The decision to move the school from Bardizag to Adabazar was not taken lightly. But the Adabazar community made an offer that Farnham could not refuse. In January 1885, she reported to

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[32] ABC 16.9.4, Women's Board, Letters, vol. 10, № 201. Farnham, Bardizag, May 14, 1884.

[33] Ibid., № 199, March 8, 1884.

[34] Ibid., vol. 8, № 123, June 18, 1882.

the Women's Board that the Adabazar community had offered to cover all costs of her school if only the Board would agree to provide two teachers for five years: "The moving and starting a new school seems to me like a mountain to lift, but I feel as if we ought to try and do all we can to make these people independent of foreign aid." She was sorry to leave the missionary family in Bardizag, she wrote, as in Adabazar there would be no resident American family, "only native friends."[35] In April, accompanied by Mrs. Parsons, Farnham spent a few days in Adabazar to survey the situation and to meet with the twelve men who were trustees of the school. She admitted that she had dreaded the meeting (perhaps recalling the bitter dispute with local trustees over the seating of women in the Bardizag church), but it had gone well. She wrote:

> You know the people here don't like to be ruled or even advised by women. So it is no easy task to talk with them. However the meeting passed off very pleasantly, much more so than I anticipated. I told them what must be done to the school building, to which they made no objections. There were two or three points on which we differed, and I agreed to write to Dr. Clark [the ABCFM Foreign Secretary in Boston] and leave the decision to him. These men were very polite.[36]

This meeting set the tone for her future relations with the Trustees. Though disputes must have arisen, Farnham's correspondence reveals no major disagreements. One stabilizing factor may have been the leader of the Adabazar Armenian community, Dr. S.K. Kanalgian, who had been educated in the United States and who remained in this position for much of this time. She was strongly supported by the local Protestant clergy, at first the Reverend Alexander Djidjizian, who, as stated, had incurred the wrath of Reverend Parsons by appealing to friends in Scotland to fund the local church edifice. Upon his death, Djidjizian was succeeded by his well-educated son, Hovsep, who had graduated from Robert College in Constantinople as well as from the Theological Seminary in Scotland.

After a difficult summer of moving furniture and supplies, and fitting up the new building, the school in Adabazar opened

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[35] Ibid., vol. 10, № 202, 1885.

[36] Ibid., № 203, April 10, 1885.

in the fall of 1885 as Adabazari Hayuhiats Varzharan. The spacious three-story building provided enough room to accommodate a preparatory primary department that was also under Farnham's direction, but her decision to admit young boys along with the girls was not readily accepted. As she explained:

> I had a rather hard time in bringing our brethren to terms on this question. Their idea of a graded school is: "Send all the boys to a *man* teacher, and all the girls to a woman." But they were talked into it, if not persuaded, and Monday all the small boys and girls will be sent to us. I predict that the next generation of men will be considerably more enlightened than their fathers are.[37]

Farnham had found the complete segregation of the sexes in Bardizag restrictive. The boys' high school had been built at the opposite end of the town, about a mile away from the girls' high school. Soon, as the girls' school was moved to Adabazar, the distance became much greater. All the same, she kept a close eye on relations between the sexes. Occasionally young male instructors were engaged to teach in the high school. Many years later one of them, Hovhannes Alexanian, recalled his first experience in 1887 when, just out of high school, he was asked to teach astronomy to Farnham's students:

> At the appointed hour I made my appearance at the school, nicely groomed and dressed, but a little excited. Miss Farnham introduced me to the class, but after the introduction, instead of leaving me alone with the students, as I expected, she went to the back of the room and stood there as a guard. She was a very strict lady especially in matters concerning boys and girls. Apparently she did not trust this young man to be alone with so many young girls, so she wanted to chaperon them. But evidently, after seeing this shy boy, she thought he was a harmless sort of creature, so she left him alone in the future.[38]

Farnham's watchful care for her students continued. In a difficult episode later, she discovered that one of her girls was receiving letters from a young man. The letters were delivered

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[37] Ibid., № 204, Sept. 25, 1885.

[38] Quoted in Fay Linder, *The History of Üsküdar American Academy, 1876-1996* (Istanbul: SEV Printing, 2000), p. 12.

by an assistant in the school who did not board in the building: "I had to be the *dragon* and guard the 'Golden Fleece'," Farnham reported. Even though the young man wrote "the most *touching* letter," begging Farnham to forgive the girl, both the student and the assistant who delivered the letters were dismissed: "The parties thought they were doing as the Europeans or the English do. I said I was doing as Americans did when the culprit was found out . . . these love affairs are very demoralizing.[39]

Farnham could not help but note the significance of her role as principal of the school in such a paternalistic society. The sources make it clear that she ran the school and that the Armenian trustees acceded to her judgment on most matters. Writing in 1888, she asserted: "Our trustees are fully persuaded that when there is business to be attended to, the ladies are the ones to entrust it to." She also realized that she was able to hold this position because she was an American. But it made no sense to her logically; why shouldn't Ottoman women take similar responsibility? "This is a very important point to get through the heads of *Orientals*," she continued in this letter. "They can't see why all the smart women were born on the other side of the Atlantic. I tell them this is not so, but the men are not bright enough to see our possibilities and take advantage of them."[40]

Living in Adabazar posed many difficulties. No foreigner of any kind or description had ever lived in this city, Farnham wrote home, and therefore the locals had little idea of European customs. She felt under constant surveillance. "So we must either eat Turkish food and have our work done in Turkish style, or do it ourselves," she explained. She never developed a taste for Middle Eastern food and kept her own kitchen. This was a source of fascination locally: "The neighbors are very curious to see us eat," she wrote. One day she created a sensation by frying donuts and felt she had to satisfy the local curiosity by explaining what went into them and how they were cooked.[41] She had installed a curtain she could pull down, so that on occasion she might enjoy a bit of privacy. With such a large school building, it was not practical for the students to perform all of

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[39] ABC 16.9.4, Letters, vol. 16, № 199, Adabazar, Jan. 31, 1902.
[40] Ibid., vol. 10, № 212, Feb. 5, 1888.
[41] Ibid., № 205, Oct. 24, 1885.

the housekeeping, and with a limited budget the solution was to ask the local Protestant Armenians to help keep up the premises. This they did gladly and lovingly, but not always up to Laura Farnham's standards: "One of our great trials is that they cannot do things quickly, and it is so hard for me to wait and lose time," she complained. "Time here is not of the least consequence, and it is really hard to make the people understand. They are constantly asking us why we do not sit down and rest." Farnham found it very difficult to have any time to herself: "The brethren and sisters are very kind—*too* kind in fact—and think they must not leave us alone at all. If only I could have a day, or even a half day, to myself, what a treat it would be. We eat, drink, and *almost* sleep in a crowd."[42]

That first semester the school enrolled fifty-one girls in the high school, sixteen of whom were boarders, and thirty-five pupils in the preparatory department. The numbers were respectable, given the fact that the local Apostolic community made every effort to prevent their people from sending their children to the school and that all students paid some tuition. Her only American assistant was Lella Parsons, who was to be married soon and leave. There was an Armenian assistant for the high school, an inexperienced eighteen-year-old girl. Fortunately, a very able Armenian teacher, one of Farnham's graduates, managed the preparatory department, where the young students proved unruly. "The children have never been accustomed to the slightest restraint," Farnham wrote, but the teacher managed them well. Because of budget imitations, the hiring of additional staff was out of the question, so local volunteers filled in. Dr. Kanalgian came two days a week to teach Turkish, and Pastor Alexander's son spent an hour each day teaching religion. Throughout this period, Dr. Kanalgian provided free medical care.[43]

Tense relations with the Armenian Apostolic community were an undercurrent throughout this period. Relations between the communities were not as overtly hostile as they had been in the mid-century, but the clergy of the Armenian Church discouraged members of their flock from enrolling their children in Protestant schools or participating in Protestant meetings. One of the

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., № 204, Sept. 25, 1885, and № 205, Oct. 24, 1885.

practices of the American schools was to hold public examinations at the end of the school year, so that the students could exhibit their skills. These events were immensely popular and attracted large audiences, including critics as well as supporters of the schools. At Adabazar, members of the audience could apparently question the students. Farnham gives the following description of the exercises in 1888:

> We did not expect many at the closing exercises as there has been so much opposition to the school this year, but before the opening exercises were over they began to come and we had a crowd. Wednesday the room was so crowded we could not get through the aisles. Some came out of curiosity, and some to find fault. They asked all sorts of questions. I had an Ancient History class, and they asked everything they could think of, but the girls did nicely. There was a graduate of Robert College who had been in the employ of the English Consul, so he was well posted in English. My class is not a very brilliant one—there is only one girl in the class in whom I can feel sure, and it was lucky for me that he got hold of that one. He asked her to conjugate all the verbs and decline the nouns, but she did nicely. Oh, how thankful I was! I was so anxious because there has been so much opposition to the school.[44]

New Challenges in the Nineties

In 1890, Farnham's agreement to run the school for five years expired, and she debated her future course. A firm believer in local control, she nonetheless could not envision an Armenian at the head of the school. As she explained:

> When I came here the people hoped to take over the school in five years. Well, the five years are up. Now they are saying they can take over after 50 years! I do not see that the principal of the school can be an Armenian. The men of this community do not have any confidence in women. I am sure if an Armenian girl were at the head of this school, the trustees would make her life a burden by their constant meddling, while the most they can do to me is to make suggestions. Of course there are matters about which we always ask their opinion.[45]

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[44] Ibid., № 216, June 29, 1889.
[45] Ibid., № 218, May 26, 1890.

The second obstacle was marriage, Farnham pointed out. No girl can decide to live unmarried. And she must do this to become a teacher, for no girl under twenty could fill the place, and after that her case is hopeless—she is too old! The third difficulty was that one teacher could not, or would not, be subordinate to another teacher, and two teachers cannot be heads at the same time.[46] Given these circumstances, she was unable to prepare another to take her place. Yet she provided a valuable role model of what could be accomplished by women.

Soon the school was full, and a room in a neighboring building was rented to obtain more space. The new railroad brought more people and attention to the area, and the demand for education was growing. At the same time, increasing efforts were made to broaden the student body beyond the Armenian Protestant community. In 1890, there were three Muslim girls (one each Turkish, Circassian, and Gypsy), two Jewish, four Greek, and ten Gregorian (Apostolic). The Americans recognized the opportunity to expand their influence and realized that, if they could not meet the demand, potential pupils would attend the Gregorian schools or support the Catholics who, Farnham cautioned, were anxious to open a school. Simultaneously, the growing restlessness of the Armenian population, especially after the demonstrations in Kum Kapu in the capital that year, led the Turkish government to pay increasing attention to what was going on. Visits to the school by Turks associated with the government became more frequent, leading Farnham to question their motives. After a delegation came in June 1890, including the wife of a judge of the supreme court, the wife of the governor, and a member of the Senate in Constantinople, Farnham wrote:

> I am rather suspicious when these high officials come lest they are spies, for at this time the Turks are very jealous of their Christian subjects. You probably heard of the riot in the Armenian Church a few weeks ago. And indeed the Turks have reason to be afraid, for their subjects are getting very restless under Turkish rule and oppression. I think there cannot but be great changes in Turkey before long. I cannot believe that the Turkish government will stand long.[47]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., № 220, Oct. 4, 1890.

The conviction that Turkey stood at a crossroads, that it could not long continue on its present path, that major change was inevitable appears constantly in Farnam's writing in the 1890s. Mixed with it was anxiety about what direction the change would take. Typical is the following observation, made in 1893:

> . . . we have come to the place here in Turkey where the people are seeking things too high for them. The young people of both sexes are restless under the restraints which tradition and custom impose upon them. There never was a time when missionaries need the wisdom of serpents as much as now. We must stand between the "old" and the "new." The next few years will decide the fate of Turkey.[48]

In 1891, when Farnham came to the United States on furlough, she managed to procure funds for building an addition to the school. Upon her return to Adabazar in 1892, it was decided to introduce a kindergarten class. Plans were drawn up for an addition, but repeated petitions to the government for a building permit went unanswered. Though the governor was outwardly friendly and always promised positive action, nothing was done. This, along with her observations of the difficult conditions under which the people lived, led Farnham to despair about the Turkish government. Space restrictions made it impossible to institute the kindergarten, all because of the lack of a building permit from the authorities: "How long, Oh God, how long shall this government be allowed to go on?" she wondered.[49] Her criticism extended to the United States government for its failure to press energetically for action by the Ottoman authorities. In an 1893 letter, she wrote: "I do wish our government would do more to make the Turkish government feel that they meant business. I should not be a good member of a 'Peace Society'. There is nothing I dread so much in this land as peace. It simply means indifference."[50]

Despite all difficulties the school was prosperous, with larger enrollments than ever before. In the fall of 1895, frustrated by the crowded conditions in the school and with no prospect of a

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[48] Ibid., vol. 13, № 223, Feb. 4, 1893.
[49] Ibid., № 228, July 29, 1893.
[50] Ibid., № 223, Feb. 4, 1893.

building permit, the trustees decided finally to rent a neighboring building in which to house the kindergarten on the first floor and provide additional dormitory space on the second floor. Funds raised by Farnham during her 1891 visit to the United States helped with the financing. From the beginning the Kindergarten program was very popular, and was always described by Farnham as "a joy." In 1896, a neighboring building was placed on the market, and Farnham began a campaign for its purchase. Unfortunately, the United States was experiencing difficult financial conditions at the time, and the Board turned down her appeal for a purchase. Indeed, the strained economic conditions in the United States compelled the Board to close schools in nearby Nicomedia, Bardizag, and Brusa, increasing the number of applicants for the Adabazar School. It was not until 1900 that Farnham was able to report the purchase of the building, which was occupied in the fall of that year. The larger premises allowed the enrollment to increase to over two hundred pupils in all departments: kindergarten, preparatory, and high school. There were sixty-six boarding students, and space for one hundred when the renovations were completed. In its fifteen years of operation, the high school had graduated ninety-nine girls, of whom twenty-five were teaching and the others were making "happy Christian homes." Farnham now had two American assistants in addition to her Armenian teachers: Mary Kenney, who supervised the kindergarten and taught music, botany, and senior English, and Susan Hyde, who assisted in the teaching.[51]

The school continued to prosper despite the challenges arising from the poverty of the people and unsettled political conditions. Another cause for concern was the tide of Armenians anxious to go to the United States to further their education. Farnham had observed this phenomenon earlier, in Bardizag, and it was continuing. "What is to be done about the American epidemic that is sweeping over the land?" she wrote in a letter to the American Board Foreign Secretary that year. All the preachers, teachers, students, and even some of the common people were showing symptoms. Students from the Marsovan Seminary who had been visiting in Bardizag "all have the same idea when nothing short of America will do," she wrote. "Of course they

[51] Ibid., № 265, March 1, 1900, № 267, Scutari, July 17, 1900, and № 268, Adabazar, Nov. 3, 1900.

(as they now think) are all coming back here to be *very* useful," she continued. "I asked them *where* they would be useful, for after being in America a man cannot live in a Turkish village."[52] The "America fever" among the Armenians posed a serious dilemma for the Americans. In general, missionary policy dictated that Armenians should be discouraged from going to the United States, based on the early experience that most who made the trip to the New World did not return home. The American Board was educating Armenians so that they might serve their own people, in their homeland. Still, in individual cases it was difficult for the missionaries to refuse to assist their Armenian students in finding an institution to further their studies or a place to live in the United States. This presented a no-win situation for the Americans. The policy of strongly opposing Armenian students going abroad to further their education was not only resented by many Armenians but also criticized by fellow Christians, who asserted that the motive of the American Board in taking this position was "to keep the Armenian youth in a state of perpetual minority in order to be able better to hold them in subjection."[53]

Natural disasters, such as the earthquake of 1894, brought additional problems. At the time, Farnham was on vacation in Bardizag, where no damage was reported. But numerous homes were destroyed or made uninhabitable in Adabazar, and there were many deaths. The school suffered only minor damage, but surrounding buildings collapsed. The disaster came on top of depressed economic conditions, including failure of the tobacco crop, and a good production season for silk that brought little benefit because of low prices. The cholera epidemic caused a delay of the school opening that year. The poor economic conditions inevitably affected adversely the school budget, which continued to be paid largely by the local community: "How can we insist that the people support their institutions when they can barely support their families?" Farnham asked.[54] The school would be a perfect joy, she wrote in 1896, if she did not have to

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[52] ABC 16.9.3, Western Turkey Mission, 1870-80, Letters, № 709, Farnham, Bardizag, July 30, 1880 (M591).

[53] Ibid., 1880-1889, Documents, № 182, article from the *Christian Standard* reviewing the work of the American Board in Turkey.(M596).

[54] ABC 16.9.4, Women's Board, vol. 13, № 232, July 19, 1894, №234, Aug. 10, 1894, and № 235, Aug. 18, 1894.

turn away all those who could not pay tuition. "The times are so hard that the people just beg and beseech us to take a little less, but we are obliged to harden our hearts and say *no*." The school had to be self-supporting.[55]

News of the widespread bloodshed accompanying the Armenian massacres of 1894-96 spread rapidly. The violence had not touched Adabazar directly, but every household had been affected in some way. And the violence had come dangerously close. Writing in the fall of 1896, Farnham reported:

> We have not suffered here from massacre, and yet not one week passes but some home is made desolate. I returned here [from summer vacation] on August 26 . . . Saturday and Sunday were anxious days. The city was surrounded by Circassians and Georgians, and an attack was expected every minute. It was only averted by the ability, energy, and tact of the Kaimakam (Governor). He was almost without troops and after telegram after telegram was sent, the soldiers did not reach here until late Sunday night. On Monday the Circassians and Georgians were sent off to their villages. All the Armenians went to express their gratitude to the governor and were greeted with the greatest courtesy, and assured that he would do all in his power to protect them. The governor also expressed the wish that his American ladies would make "honorable mention" of his efforts, which I did in a note to Mr. Terrell. [Alexander Terrell, U.S. Minister to the Ottoman Empire].[56]

Farnham marveled at the fact that the more downtrodden and impoverished the people became, the more determined they were to educate their children. It was as if education constituted their only hope for a better future. "The present condition of the country seems to have this effect, to make the people feel they must educate their children. Our schoolwork is very hopeful but outside the outlook is dark indeed. The people are almost in despair and the situation disheartening to the last degree."[57]

The events of the 1890s seem to have brought the two Armenian communities, Apostolic and Protestant, closer together. A heightened sense of anxiety filled the air, as everyone wondered "if the storm has passed or is only gaining force," Farnham

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[55] Ibid., № 250, Oct. 24, 1896.
[56] Ibid., № 251, Nov. 26, 1896.
[57] Ibid., № 250, Oct. 24, 1896.

wrote. She added that "the poverty and distress of the people is increasing," and that "all religious animosity seems for the time to be done away with." The Protestant preacher had been invited twice to preach in the Armenian Apostolic church, and the church was filled on these occasions. Later in return, one of the Armenian priests (*vardapet*) preached in the Protestant chapel: "It was such an unheard-of occurrence that the chapel was filled," Farnham wrote. "Of course it was not a very spiritual discourse, but it shows that the spirit of opposition is entirely dying out." The Apostolic Armenians were now responding by opening and modernizing their own schools, and Farnham said that she welcomed the competition.[58]

Instead of rigidly demanding that their students accept all the tenets and practices of the Protestant religion, as they had in the past, the American educators now concentrated on conveying the essence of the religion, largely through the study of the Bible. They had the confidence that their students would carry this spirit in life no matter what church they attended. There was even the hope that these students would foster reform in the Armenian Church, as the missionaries had advocated in their earliest days in the Near East. In 1900, Farnham proudly reported that one of her graduates had accepted a position in a Gregorian school. Protestants in the villages were often too impoverished to be able to support a teacher. The Gregorians had so much larger communities that they could afford to pay a teacher, Farnham explained. The new teacher "made the condition that she should be required to do nothing against her conscience, so we are glad to have her there."[59]

Yet old grievances had not entirely disappeared. Farnham described the chain of events that occurred following an unusually heavy snowstorm in November 1897, when the roof of the Protestant church collapsed—fortunately with no harm to the sixty or seventy pupils in attendance in the boys' school located in the basement. The Protestant Armenians requested permission to use the Apostolic Church for services until a new building could be built; the matter was referred to the bishop, who suggested that the Protestants rent a room, and the Apostolics would pay the rent. This was regarded as an insult; a roof was

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[58] Ibid., № 245, Feb. 16, 1896.
[59] Ibid., № 266, April 28, 1900.

placed over the boys' school, and church services were held temporarily in the girls' school.[60]

With the dawn of the new century, the outlook for the school appeared rosier. The new building had not only eased the overcrowding of the past decades, but also allowed the addition of an upper preparatory department, designed to meet the needs of students from areas outside of Adabazar who did not have access to the existing preparatory school (which was a day school, not a boarding facility) and therefore were not ready for the increasingly high standards of the high school. According to a description of the school by a former teacher, in the first decade of the twentieth century:

> Gradually the grading of the school has been improved, the course of study has been extended, and written examinations instead of oral ones have been introduced, so that at the present time the curriculum does not differ much from that of an ordinary high school in the United States, except that the study of ancient Armenian and Turkish takes the place of Greek and Latin, and much attention is given to sewing of all kinds.[61]

A friend of one of the teachers at the school, visiting from the United States in the early 1900s, provides a striking glimpse of Laura Farnham, seated around a dining table:

> More than once we forgot the clock, listening to Miss Laura Farnham tell of her twenty-five years in Asia Minor; we scarcely allowed her to eat at all, so constantly did we ply her with questions. It is one of the miracles of which missionary annals are so full, that this frail woman, who has carried heaviest responsibilities and lived through such trials of patience and such real dangers as appalled us in the mere recital, should yet keep her cheery laugh and her sunny spirit as fresh as at the beginning, though her hair is snow white and she seems too delicate to be far from an invalid's sofa. . . . She rules like an empress the whole Christian community of Adabazar, and even the natives and officials stand in wholesome awe of her sturdy maintenance of her rights as principal of the mission school.[62]

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[60] *Missionary Herald*, April 1898, p. 147.

[61] Marion E. Sheldon, *The Armenian Girls' High School in Adabazar, Turkey* (Boston: Woman's Board of Missions, circa 1910), p. 6.

[62] Alice Goddard West, "A Missionary Collection," *Light and Life*, vol. 33

The rise of a democratic spirit among the Armenians, while certainly fostered by the teachings of the Americans, nonetheless threw "shadows" over the relative calm of life in Adabazar. The school trustees had been a self-perpetuating body, in that they themselves filled any vacancies. Now, with two vacancies, a new group circulated a petition calling for the election of trustees by the local Protestants. A compromise solution whereby the existing trustees would nominate four candidates and the people would vote to elect two of the four was rejected on the ground that the two men elected would be a minority. More meetings and more anxiety followed: "I am sure this is a stage that people must go through," Farnham wrote philosophically:

> The new is trying to get adjusted to the old. It is the new piece on the old garment. The whole life here is in a transition state. The conservatives are slow to acknowledge that the young people must have a part in the management of affairs. The young people *know* too much and think the old ones are *old fogies* and they are going to reform the world. I am sure in the end things will get adjusted but the process is messy.[63]

As usual, commencement was a major event. Describing the event in 1902, Farnham observed that "every inch of space in the chapel was filled. . . . The Armenian bishop and all the Turkish officials were present and made fine speeches which they do not mean—at least I do not believe they are sincere. If they did, and acted up to their belief, we would not be needed here."[64] An alumnae association had been formed, and it supported one needy student every year and met various needs, for example by providing funds to purchase a higher quality piano for the music room.[65] An especially generous benefactor was a graduate who had married and moved to New York City. In 1906, it was reported that Mrs. Sarkis Telfeyan and her husband had been present at the graduation exercises and had donated 400 Turkish pounds (valued at $1,320 at the time) for the establishment of a Teacher Training department. The school trustees certified that

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(July 1903), pp. 292-93.

[63] ABC 16.9.4, vol. 16, № 199, Jan. 31, 1902.

[64] Ibid., № 200, July 9, 1902.

[65] Sheldon, *The Armenian Girls' High School in Adabazar*, pp. 10, 15.

they would again be responsible for all of the expenses if the Woman's Board would support a teacher from America. The 400 Turkish pounds, it was believed, was sufficient to purchase a building adjacent to the school garden for this purpose.[66]

The offer was accepted by the Woman's Board, and Madeline Gile was appointed to this teaching position. A graduate of the Boston Training School, she had several years of teaching experience, most recently in the Proctor Academy in Provo, Utah. She sailed to Turkey in late 1907, in the company of Mary Kenney, who was returning to Adabazar after a one-year furlough in the United States. Gile went on to begin a Teachers Training class in September 1909, and the first graduates received their diplomas in June 1910, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the school. Unfortunately ill health forced Miss Gile to return to the United States that year, and the Teacher Training Class was closed until a new teacher could be found.[67]

The desire of the local Armenian Protestant community to expand the school with a Teacher Training department is telling evidence of their pride in the school and their satisfaction with the cooperative arrangement established for its operation. This kind of partnership between Americans and Armenians was all too rare; on the contrary, the literature of the period is full of complaints by the Armenians that they were not allowed to participate in the decision-making process in the operation of institutions established ostensibly for their benefit; on the other hand, the opinion of missionaries was that the Armenians were making unreasonable demands. Laura Farnham focused her attention on her school; her name is not found prominently in missionary meetings or articles, and there is no evidence that she participated in the current debates. But she obviously had a strategy for working with the local Armenian community, and in a rare letter to Foreign Secretary James Barton in Boston in 1908, she made her philosophy clear. The issue, at the time, was control over the Protestant newspaper published by the American Board in Constantinople, the *Avedaper* (*Avetaber*; Messen-

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[66] ABC 16.9.3, vol. 28, Documents, 1900-1909, vol. 1, № 148, Joseph K. Greene, Istanbul, Jan. 2, 1907; vol. II, Chambers, № 156-157, Adabazar, Aug. 21 and Dec. 27, 1906 (M617).

[67] Linder, *Üsküdar*, pp. 16-17, 23.

ger): "From our standpoint, the time has long passed for their work to be given over to the people," she wrote and then continued:

> No foreigner can publish a paper that will meet the needs of a people as one of themselves can. Our people object in Constantinople that they do not know anyone able to take charge of the paper. Let *them* [i.e. the Armenians] find the man. I have confidence in them that their best man will be chosen. Throw the *responsibility on them*. . . . Let us meet them half way—grant their petition *graciously*. In Maine logging camps the man who complained of the food was made cook. It is a good rule and works well. The people will make mistakes. The present editor has made serious mistakes. *Our experiences* here working with our native friends have taught *us* and *them* many lessons.[68]

The constitutional revolution in 1908 offered prospects for a better future in Turkey, a hope that was shattered by the Adana massacres the following year in April of 1909. Yet Laura Farnham and her colleagues moved ahead with plans for further advances, specifically to develop the Teacher Training class associated with the school. In 1910, she went home to Maine to care for an invalid brother. It was only her second trip home in her thirty-eight years of service, and she had every intention to return. But her own poor health led her to postpone her trip. Perhaps it was best that she was in America, and not in Adabazar, during the terrible days of war and Genocide that followed. She passed away in 1919.

Postscript

With the outbreak of World War I, the Turkish military took over the Adabazar school buildings for use as a military hospital, and classes were suspended for four years. Subsequently Mary Kinney, who had succeeded Laura Farnham as principal of the school, returned to Adabazar from Egypt, where she had been

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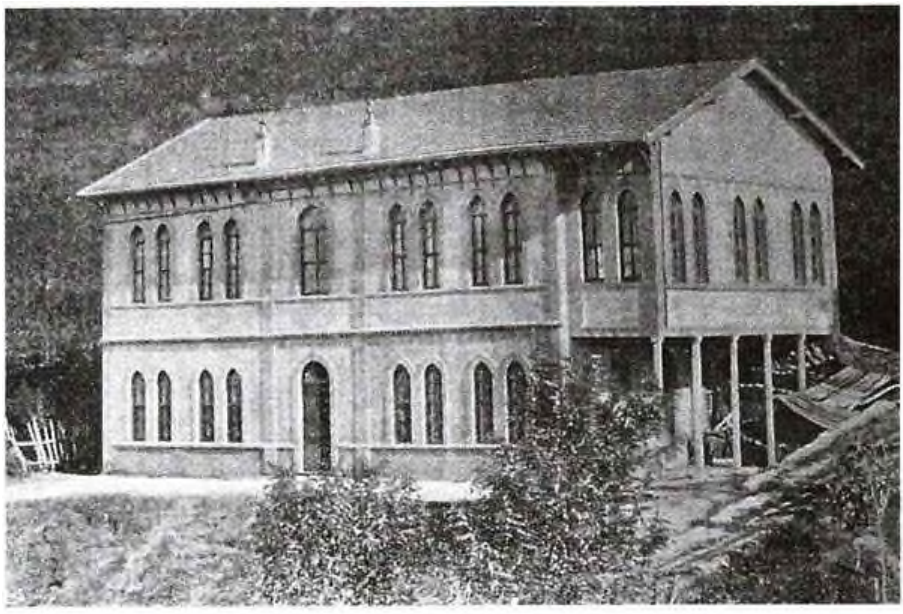
[68] ABC 16.9.3, vol. 28, Documents, 1900-1909, vol. II, № 226, Farnham to Barton, Adabazar, Oct. 14, 1908. The controversy over *Avedaper* is discussed in Jonathan Conant Page, *Ringing the Gotchnag: Two American Missionary Families in Turkey, 1855-1922* (Boston: New England Genealogical Society, 2009), pp. 220-37.

working with refugees during the war. With the help of a former teacher, Sophie S. Holt, she supervised the transfer of the school to the Uskudar section of Constantinople, to occupy the former premises of the Constantinople College for Women, which had meanwhile moved to its new campus in Arnavutkoy. In Uskudar the school has continued to the present time; it is now known Uskudar American Academy and is operated by the Health and Education Foundation (SEV), a Turkish non-profit trust. Offering a kindergarten through grade twelve education, it specializes in a college preparatory curriculum with an emphasis on the sciences. In 1990, it became a coeducational institution.[69]

This is the legacy of Laura Farnham, who doubtless would find the loss of school's Christian character extremely painful, but who would certainly be pleased that the Uskudar American Academy is regarded today as one of the most academically rigorous institutions in Turkey.

[69] Sophie S. Holt, "War Experiences in Turkey," *Duluth Herald*, Oct. 3, 1915; Linder, *Üsküdar*, pp. 27-37.

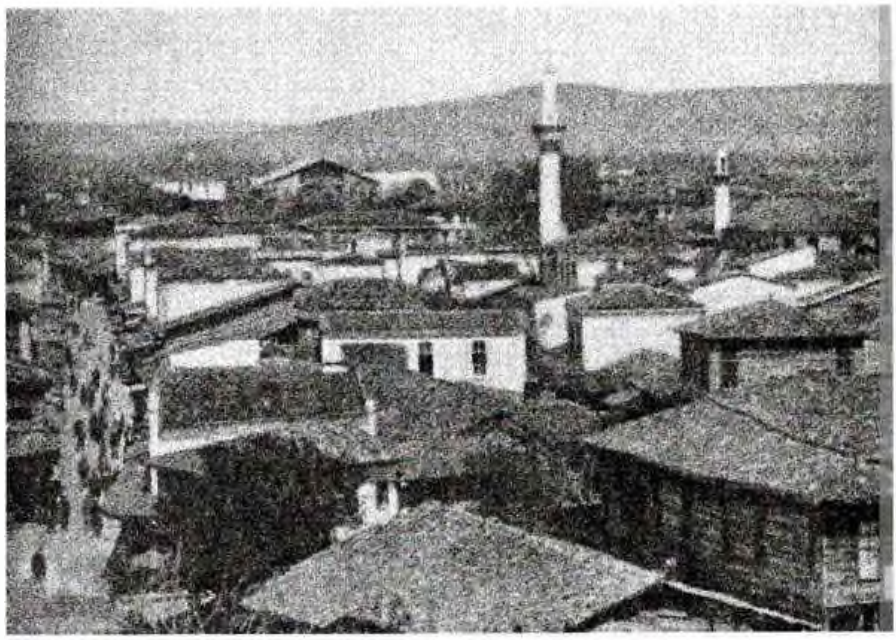
Laura Farnham



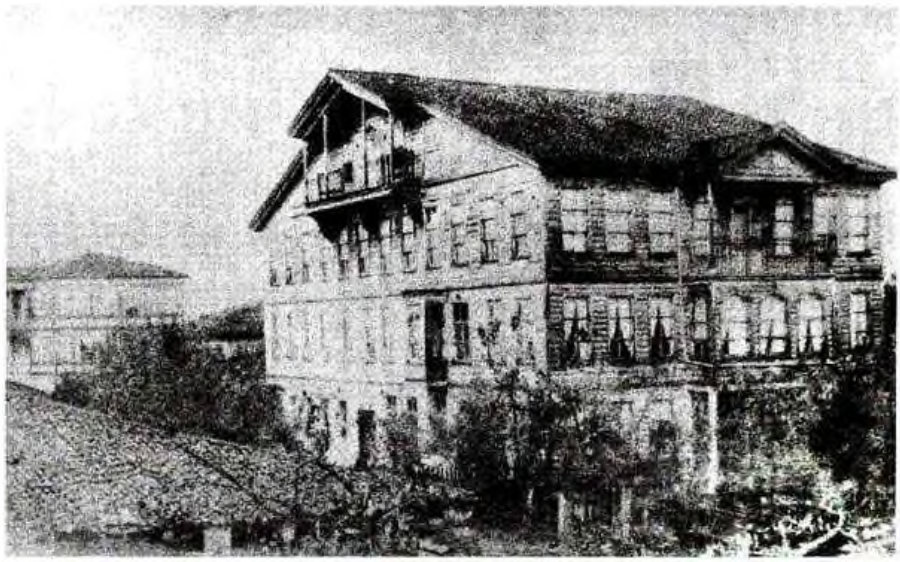
Bardizag: Chambers and Newman Halls

Bardizag: Chambers Family with Bithynia High School Students and Alumni

Bardizag: Armenian Protestant School



Adabazar



Adabazar: American Board School, 1890

Adabazar: Armenian Girls' High School, Early 1900s

Adabazar: Armenian Girls' High School Diploma, 1906

Adabazar: Mary Kinney

Adabazar: Mary Kinney, Mary Riggs, Laura Farnham